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SUBJECT: GUATEMALA'S NEW LEFT: THE NEW REPUBLIC MOVEMENT  
(PART 1 OF 3)

Classified By: Poloff Lucy Chang for reasons 1.4 (b,d)

**¶11.** (C) Summary: Amid growing insecurity, narco-related violence, and an economic crisis, independent Congressman Anibal Garcia has announced the formation of a new leftist movement to promote reform and to represent traditionally under-represented sectors of the population. Garcia hopes to turn his nascent movement into a political party and to participate in the 2011 national elections. The red-shirted members of his "New Republic Movement," invoking Chavez imagery and ideology, claim to seek to create "a more just and transparent republic free of special privileges and monopolies." While Garcia did not specifically mention any ties to Venezuelan or Cuban groups and maintained that his movement was privately funded by individuals, the movement's rhetoric and imagery suggest Venezuelan influence. End Summary.

Vision for Change

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**¶12.** (C) On March 29, independent Congressman Anibal Garcia officially announced the formation of a new leftist movement. Press photos showed red-shirted activists standing in a row -- an image that many here interpreted as associating the movement with the Chavez government. Garcia asserted that his "New Republic Movement" (MNR) opposes the current socio-economic model and proposes a new, egalitarian state without monopolies and special privileges reserved for the few. In an April 6 meeting with poloff, Garcia, who was elected to Congress as representative for the Encounter for Guatemala (EG) party in November 2007, explained that he left the party in October 2008 and became independent as a result of fundamental differences of view with the party leadership.

(Comment: It is more likely that he left EG after failing to wrestle the party away from EG leader and co-founder Nineth Montenegro. End Comment).

**¶13.** (C) According to Garcia, EG did not share his vision for more radical change. He said that Guatemalans are tired of populist discourse without action and want new faces and new ideas. While he did not criticize EG leader Nineth Montenegro, with whom he co-founded the party in 2005, he argued that EG is - an agent for change8 or in a position to meet the country's challenges. He lamented that after almost 25 years of democracy Guatemala is still facing almost the same situation as before, or worse. He stressed the need for change, particularly to combat criminal impunity and political corruption and to protect workers' rights, but noted that many sectors are resistant to change.

**¶14.** (C) Garcia opined that the country lacks direction, leadership, and new ideas. Political parties are - institutionalized8 or well defined, and politicians switch

from one party to another. He noted that at least 90 of the current 158 members of Congress at one point were affiliated with the National Advancement Party (PAN) and switched to other political parties based on their personal interests. (Note: PAN was considered a right-wing party in the 1990s. The left wing characterized it as the big money, big business party. End note.)

**¶15. (C)** Garcia hopes to turn his movement into a political party to run in the 2011 national elections, and has already initiated the process. Currently, he has a team of 45 young national leaders who are engaged in grassroots mobilization to build a support base throughout the country. When asked Qto build a support base throughout the country. When asked about funding, Garcia claimed that his movement is funded solely by individual voluntary contributions and his congressional salary, and that it is operating on a shoestring budget with volunteers, minimal publicity, and a provisional coordinating committee. Nonetheless, he said, it is building momentum both in and outside the capital. (Note: While he did not specifically mention Venezuela or Cuba, his use of imagery invoking the Chavez government leads us to wonder about possible Venezuelan or Cuban financing. End note.)

#### Ties to Other Political Groups

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**¶16. (C)** Garcia stated that his movement is not affiliated with any political party in Guatemala, but has close ties to other political groups in Latin America and shares its vision with the Social Democratic Party in Germany, the Socialist Party in Spain, and "similar parties in other countries." (He refrained from specifically mentioning Cuba or Venezuela.) He claimed that it also has close relations with Guatemalan

labor unions, including the Guatemalan Workers Union (UGT) and the Workers Trade Union of Guatemala (UNSITRAGUA), San Carlos University, and peasant leaders. Garcia characterized his movement as "leftist, progressive, democratic, and accessible." When asked how it differs from the Guatemalan National Revolutionary Unity (URNG) with which he was formerly affiliated, he asserted that the MNR has a &broader vision<sup>8</sup> and represents those who traditionally have not been represented in the political process, such as labor unions and the middle class. (Note: The real difference, as is often the case in Guatemalan politics, is almost surely one of personalities; i.e., Garcia gets to be in charge this time.)

#### View of the U.S. and Obama

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**¶17. (U)** Garcia, who celebrated President Obama's victory along with other Guatemalans, expressed confidence that Obama's leadership would enhance mutually beneficial cooperation for economic and political development. He views the Obama Administration as an opportunity for Latin America and President Obama as &an extraordinary visionary<sup>8</sup> who can empathize and connect across boundaries. Garcia acknowledged that immigration is a very complex issue driven by poverty at home, but hoped that President Obama would review the issue. Guatemalans, he said, expect the President to have a different vision than his predecessor.

**¶18. (U)** Garcia criticized CAFTA-DR as an inequitable trade agreement and expressed hope that it would be revised. He claimed that Guatemala's fiscal system only benefits large companies. For example, he argued that Q3 billion (USD 375 million) in exemptions under the Law of Maquilas benefit only the maquila industry and that those exemptions constitute a system of monopoly and privilege. Garcia asserted that in many cases, as in the case of CAFTA-DR, it is not the free trade agreement itself that is bad, but rather internal country conditions that prevent workers from fully benefiting from such agreements.

#### Comment

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**¶19. (C)** Garcia is an aggressive lawyer who served as President

of the Law Students Association at San Carlos University, a position which required patronage, political influence, and good academic standing. In 1999, he unsuccessfully ran as URNG congressional candidate for Sacatepequez. In 2007, he successfully ran as an EG congressional candidate and took office in January 2008. Despite his political ties, aspirations, and claims of broad appeal, his movement is not likely to gain much traction or to occupy any important political space in Guatemala. It may attract a limited following among the disenfranchised and disillusioned, especially those disillusioned with the current feckless administration and its seeming inability to control the escalating violence and insecurity. Garcia's use of Chavez-like imagery may prove to be a tactical mistake in this fairly conservative country. That said, with the current and previous governments challenged by poverty and insecurity, at least some groups on the margins are hoping for a populist alternative.

McFarland